# CHURCH UNION IN SINGAPORE AND MALAYSIA.

## A Report of Discussions Held by the 1965 Senior Class of Trinity Theological College.

*The story of the "Union Scheme" below is as follows: During the second term in 1965, in the senior class at Trinity Theological College, we were studying the nature of the Church in Systematic Theology. One of the students presented an essay on "The Unity of the Church". During the discussion of the essay in the class many interesting and important questions were raised concerning the question of Church Union in Singapore and Malaysia. We therefore decided to spend a certain part of the third term in dealing with this subject. Four students, James Wong, Tony Chi, Tang Kin Wah and George Wan, James Wong being an Anglican and the rest Methodists, worked out the original scheme. They used the Constitution of the Church of South India, the Union Schemes for Ceylon and North India and Pakistan as their basic material but studied also to certain extent the earlier Faith and Order-discussions and Church Union negotiations in Malaysia and Singapore. Their proposals were then discussed in the class. Before the final version was made definite the Anglican and Methodist bishops kindly accepted invitations to come to the class to give their view points on the subject.*
(Cf., Bishop Sansbury's article in *The Courier*, January 1966.)

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INTRODUCTION:

The purpose of these discussions is to provide an opportunity for students of the Senior Class to think through the problems related to Church Union in this country and to try to suggest some possible solutions to the problems. It is helpful to know that there is much value in having the students to work out a plan for Church Union as they will be the future leaders in the Church. D. T. Niles once suggested that in any Church Union discussion it is necessary to have "young negotiators". The thought behind this proposition is that negotiations for church unity may take a long time. Delay will be inevitable if a new generation has to take up negotiations "de novo."

This history of Church Union discussion in Singapore and Malaya goes back to July 1952 when the first official meeting of the Faith and Order Commission of the M.C.C. was held. At this meeting Bishop H. Baines gave a talk on the Lambeth Quadrilateral, which was also translated into Chinese. Subsequently there were regular meetings of this Faith and Order group. But on 29th November 1960 a new start was given to the Church Union discussion when a Negotiating Committee was formed and held their first meeting. Five meetings were convened by this Negotiating Committee and the last one was held on March 1962. The next meeting was a proposed two-days Conference to be held in Kuala Lumpur in June 1962 but owing to unforeseen circumstances it had to be cancelled. Since then no further meeting was held and it seems that all the foregoing efforts made by our Church leaders to discuss Church Union have reached a stalemate.

It is hoped that as a result of the discussions which the Senior Class of 1965 have had we will feel the greatness of the task and the urgency and challenge of our time to work harder, under God, to witness the reality of a United Church in Singapore and Malaysia within our generation.

## THE EXISTING PROBLEMS CONCERNING CHURCH UNION.

A) Theological

The basis for discussion was the Lambeth Quadrilateral. There was agreement on:

1. *The Bible:* as containing all things necessary for salvation.
2. *The Creeds:* Both the Apostolic and Nicene creeds were accepted as historically and theologically valid as the sufficient statement of faith. But in view of our time and place we feel that there is a need to formulate a new Confession of Faith for the United Church.
3. *The Sacraments:* Recognize only two—baptism and Holy Communion as dominical. With regards to baptism we would accept both infant and adult baptisms.
4. *The Ministry:* Accept the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter (priest) and deacon. But noted that there is a difference in interpretation regarding the episcopacy.

While we recognize that there are historic differences yet there are also present realities, as for example, Christians are a minority group, there is an urgency in the evangelistic task, and the need to prove to the non-Christians that the Gospel is indeed a message of reconciliation. So in the light of these realities we cannot allow the differences to continue in dividing us.

We also see there are problems in deciding whether we should have a unified ministry at the inauguration of the United Church or to follow the Church of South India scheme.

B) Non-theological

1. *Autonomy of the participating Churches:* It is recognized that apart from the Chinese Church of Christ and the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the other churches in Singapore and Malaysia who would be interested in the Church Union scheme are not independent. Therefore this would present one of the greatest problems for entering into negotiation for Church Union. These Churches will need to become antonomous first before they can decide on union. However, in achieving autonomy it does not mean that all ties with the mother churches in the Western countries shall be severed. Rather a relation of close partnership should be maintained as far as possible.

The chief problems related to autonomy are:

a) *Self-government*

i) The local churches at present lack an adequate supply of trained leaders. We realise that in the past there was little planned programme in leadership training for the nationals to take over. For example, in the Methodist Annual Conference

it was found that there were not more than ten properly trained local ministers who had four years of primary theological education before 1960.

ii) There is still much division of opinion, rivalry and jealousy among the local clergy which make it difficult for any one of them to be appointed the head of their church. This problem of reluctance to recognize and accept their own leaders can only be resolved by the local Christians themselves.

b) *Self-support*

i) We realize that at present a large proportion of the financial support comes in from the churches in the Western countries. Measures must be taken by our churches to find local support from amongst our own church members.

ii) In the Methodist Churches it was felt that the absence of a unified salary scheme for the pastors and church workers is a hindrance towards achieving self-support.

iii) There is also lack of education given to our church members on the Christian principles of stewardship. We recognize that in Singapore as well as in many of the larger cities in Malaysia the society is really affluent and yet the giving of these Christians do not match up to their wealth. Perhaps this is a clear indication of the lack of Christian commitment in their life and faith.

iv) We also recognize that easy access to foreign aid will discourage our own people to make sacrifices in Christian giving.

c) *Self-propagation*

i) Again, owing to lack of commitment there is no desire on the part of our Church members to witness to the non-Christians. The churches in this country are not sensitive to the mission of the Church and therefore not obedient to Christ's great commission.

ii) The reason why our church members are not willing to witness for Christ is because of the ineffective programme of Christian education and nurture in our Churches. There is very little spiritual life and power in many of our Churches.

iii) The concept of the Church as a "koinonia" has not been fully and honestly expressed. Hence the members don't feel they are knitted together in Christian fellowship nor is this spirit of fellowship affecting those who are outside the Church.

iv) However, not all the problems in missionary outreach are imposed from within. There are also external hindrances to the propagation of the Gospel. In Malaysia there is no complete religious freedom—for example, the law forbids the preaching of the Gospel to the Malays.

2. *Inter-church relationship*

There is very little participation in inter-church activities from the ordinary church members. Hence the value and necessity of co-operation in the life and witness of the Church have not been experienced at the

"grass-root" level. The ignorance of ordinary church members in the traditions, beliefs and liturgies of churches other than their own does not help to promote closer co-operation and greater understanding in interchurch relationship. Nevertheless it is helpful to realise that there are certain areas in which churches can co-operate without waiting for Church Unity. For example, to produce a common educational policy in our Church Schools and in the planning of new Churches.

3. *Attitude towards Church Union*

Within different denominations there are those who hold unfavourable opinions as to the value and the need for Church Union. This is true of the clergy as well as the laity. Consequently either they do not wish to commit themselves to any plan of Church Union or they oppose it altogether.

4. *Lack of ecumenical leaders*

Among those who support the idea of Church Union it is felt that they have not been able to put forward a positive scheme of Church Union. We really do not have enough Asian theologians and ecumenical experts in this country to work out such a scheme. At present those who are involved in the ecumenical dialogue have done very little to inculcate the ecumenical spirit in others. We lack the dynamic and articulate leadership which is so necessary to bring about a constructive scheme of Church Union. The M.C.C. has hitherto done little to provide this leadership.

## SOME SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS.

1. *Faith of the Church*

We see the necessity of adopting a Confession of Faith which is to be relevant to our situation and times. This Confession will have to be able to express the Christian beliefs of our Church in contemporary language. This Confession will be embodied in the liturgy of the United Church but will not replace the historic creeds. It will be used in conjunction with it.

It is suggested that a theological commission be set up to formulate this Confession so that there will be some general agreement and understanding as to the faith of this United Church.

2. *Intercommunion and United Worship*

We realise that our present state of division raises problems concerning intercommunion between the Anglican and non-Anglican Churches in this country. Hence we suggest that churches can begin to understand more of each other if they can occasionally meet together in common worship, especially around the Lord's Table. Therefore, whenever it is desired and possible inter-communion should be practiced, but each should respect the conscience and opinion of the others concerning this matter.

3. *Service of reconciliation*

It is felt that a service of reconciliation will not be necessary, as it will give the impression that the validity of the non-episcopal ministry has not been recognized until such a service takes place.

4. *The ordained ministry*

a) That there will be bishops, presbyters and deacons.

b) That there will be a unified ministry right from the beginning of the United Church. No perfect solution can be found which will satisfy every one in this problem concerning the ministry. In this suggestion for a unified ministry we are not advocating a form which will involve the re-ordination of the clergy. There are however three stages in this solution:

i) that the existing heads of churches be recognized as the new bishops of the United Church. There is no necessity to hold a service of re-consecration for these new bishops. But, however, bishops from the Church of South India or some other churches will be invited to participate at the Inaugural Service. At one stage of this service these invited bishops will officiate in a laying-on-of-hands ceremony to be regarded as an ancient symbol of the renewal of the gift of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon them at their ordination. This ceremony is not regarded as re-consecration but rather it is an act whereby they are commended to the new Church as their new bishops.

ii) All the clergy will also go through this laying-on-of-hands ceremony at subsequent services. These services will be conducted by these new bishops of the United Church. Again the intention is the same as the former and not to be regarded as re-ordination.

iii) All subsequent ordinations of new clergy will be done by our bishops of this United Church.

5. *A Negotiating Committee*

That a Negotiating Committee be set up by the Churches who wish to join this Union scheme. This Committee will have a balanced number of clergy and laity. Members of this Committee will represent their Churches and be authorized to speak for their Churches. Their recommendations should be seriously considered by their own churches for implementation.

Dr. John Fleming points out that there are two alternative ways of approach:

i) we may demand of one another certain changes or "corrections" of coming together in a closer union;

or ii) we may accept one another as brethren first, then go on to discuss our differences, and seek a way to resolve them together.

There is no doubt whatsoever that the second alternative will have to be adopted by the Negotiating Committee.

6. *Autonomy for the local churches*

A) *Self-Government*

i) We recommend that as much as possible of the leadership be entrusted to nationals.

ii) We recognize that at the beginning of the life of this United Church these national leaders may not be entirely competent, and perhaps inadequately prepared for their great responsibility. Nevertheless the Church should be prepared to accept them and support their leadership.

iii) Once this step has been taken whereby we have got our own people to lead the new Church we will then endeavour to select suitable younger men to be trained for leadership in the Church.

iv) The retiring age of all clergy and bishops be 65.

v) There will still be room for missionary partnership. But it will mean that the missionaries are invited by the Church to work alongside the local leaders. They will have less responsibility in administration and policies making in their new role as missionary-partners of this new Church.

B) *Self-support*

1. We believe that if all the separate churches combine their resources it will help to eliminate unnecessary duplication of properties, expenditures and personnel. It will mean that what cannot be done as separate units in obtaining sufficient financial support can now be done in the united Church.

2. There will need to be a standardized salary scale for the church workers on a more equal basis. This salary scale will have to be adjusted in a realistic way so that the givings of our people will be able to meet the need.

3. The needs of the Church should be made known to all the members. This will be reinforced with greater emphasis in educating our Church members on the importance of systematic stewardship. It will also mean that the Church's budget should be as economical and realistic as possible.

4. Our Church should be fully responsible in the maintenance of the normal expenses in the running of the Church and the support of its own ministry. However, outside support would be welcome to share in meeting the specific needs of special projects from time to time.

C) *Self-propagation*

1. In emphasising the need for the United Church to govern itself and be responsible for its own evangelistic outreach it is helpful to underline the fact that foreign missionaries would still be welcome to share in the spreading of the Gospel. These missionaries will be invited by the local Church to come and work in this country and they will be given special responsibilities which the local people are unable to perform.

2. The ministry of the laity will be given greater emphasis. It will be the constant concern of all that the laity make their full contribution in the life of the Church. In order to help the laity to make an effective contribution to the propagation of the Gospel it is necessary for the Church to provide more training for them.

3. All the clergy and full-time Church workers must also be properly trained and equipped to do their work. This will mean that the theological colleges will have a vital role to play. Refresher courses for the clergy and post-graduate studies should also be made available.

4. The Church will use every way and means of modern communication to help in its evangelism. We note that there is room for improvement in the missionary outreach through medical missions, educational institutions, Christian literature, radio and television, industrial missions and new approaches for the massive housing estates in the large cities should be explored. As we face the masses of people who still have not been reached with the Gospel there is an urgent need for the Church to re-think its concept and pattern of the ministry.

5. The principle of Church-State separation will be upheld. The Church will always strive to promote a just and more equal society and for the maintenance of peace and harmony among the different races. The Church will also endeavour to work for the well-being of the society.

6. This United Church will speak with one voice on behalf of the Christians in this country. It will make every effort to secure complete and actual religious freedom to propagate the Gospel to all the people irrespective of race.

## STUDY COMMISSIONS

We realize that there are still many other problems for which we have not found any solution. However, these problems are important and they must be thoroughly and objectively discussed first before we can agree on a scheme of Church Union. We recommend that study commissions be set up to find out what differences could be resolved and agreements reached. Members on these commissions will be authorized to speak for their Churches. We suggest the following study commissions:

1. Faith and Order.
2. Inter-Church co-operation.
3. Life and Work.
4. Joint Actions for Mission.
5. Finance, properties and personnel.
6. Liturgy.

## PLAN OF UNION (outline form)

*Preamble:* Purpose of the Union.

*Part I: Name and Title.*

*Part II: Faith and Order.*

1. Nature of the Church.
2. Membership of the Church.
3. Faith of the Church.
4. The Worship of the Church.
5. The Sacraments of the Church.
6. The ministry of Christ.
7. The ministry of the Church.
8. The ordained ministry.
9. The Order of Life of the Church.
10. The Congregation in the Church.
11. Marriage in the Church.
12. Legislation in the Church.
13. Relations with other Churches and missionary societies.
14. The autonomy of the Church.

*Part III: Administration and Discipline.*

1. Membership.
2. Church organisation.
3. The ministry of the bishops.
4. The ministry of presbyters and deacons.
5. The ministry of the laity.
6. Pastorates and congregations.
7. Diocesan Councils.
8. The Synod.
9. Disciplinary Courts.
10. Marriage Law of the Church.
11. Alteration of the Constitution.

*Part IV: The Inauguration of Union.*

1. The establishment of dioceses.
2. Unification of the ministry.
3. The selection and appointment of the first bishops.
4. Property and Finance.
5. The Inaugural Committee of the Church.
6. The first meetings of Diocesan Councils and Synod.
7. The position of missionaries and their relation with their societies.
8. The service of Inauguration.

*Part V: The Ordinal of the Church.*

1. Order of Service for the Consecration of Bishops.
2. Order of Service for the Ordination of Presbyters.
3. Order of Service for the Ordination of Deacons.